



The Complete Guide to

Reputation Management

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Two summers ago, a foreign exchange student from Sweden lived with my family for the summer. We went to our local grocery store and she was flabbergasted by the array of options and alternatives on offer, especially in the cereal aisle.

Perhaps you've had this feeling yourself? Unless you are a loyalist of a particular cereal variant – maybe you are ride or die with Honey Nut Cheerios or whatever – confronting 50 yards of cereal stacked five high on shelves can be a little perplexing. Overwhelming, even.

Despite having SO MANY possibilities, the ability to actually settle on one can be fraught with uncertainty. Corn Flakes? Rice Crispys? Who can decide?

This is Hick's Law at work, right there in your supermarket.

Hick's Law, posited in 1952 and named after researcher William Edmund Hick, says that the more choices we have, the harder it is to choose.

In the modern, developed world, Hick's Law rides shotgun with us frequently, and not just in cereal decision-making. We are fortunate enough to have A LOT of choices in many circumstances and scenarios, but perhaps nowhere is this more prevalent than when we're trying to locate a business online.

Nearly every Google, Yelp or TripAdvisor search for goods and services providers unveils a cornucopia of options, often triggering the *paradox of choice* that Hick's Law describes.

And this is why online reputation is so critical. Because only the most diehard consumer will spend time visiting every website of every potential vendor. The rest of us do the logical thing and engage in the behaviour that removes the paralysis that accompanies too many choices – we scan the average rating and a few reviews and look at the accompanying data. Armed with that information, we make a confident, friction-free selection.

The opinions of customers have always been important. But today, when those opinions are displayed prominently in search results for all to see (and act upon) consumer opinion and reputation management has never been more critical.

As you'll learn in this *Complete Guide to Reputation Management* from my friends at Yext, every business needs to implement and perfect four operating principles.

First, you need to actively manage your reputation. Which means you must spend time assessing and tracking what's being said about your organisation online. And you must provide complete and accurate information about your brand, and its locations, everywhere and always. The fastest way to erode reputation is the existence of incomplete or inaccurate data. The hundreds (or thousands) of pieces of information about what you are, who you serve, where, and how, must be consistent.

Second, you need to answer reviews. Answering reviews not only demonstrates that you're listening, it has a material mathematical effect on average rating, which translates into customers, revenue and profit. After all, no response IS a response, isn't it? No response is a response that says, "We care so little about your satisfaction that we refuse to even acknowledge your experience with us."

Third, you need to reply quickly. Speed is often interpreted as caring. The faster you are to respond, the more credit consumers give you for that response, regardless of the actual content of the reply. As I describe in my book *Hug Your Haters*, speed is the number one element that consumers care about when they want a reply from a business. Speed is more important than empathy, humor, or even politeness.

Finally, you need more reviews. You must encourage your customers to provide honest feedback. Always follow the best practices outlined by each site to generate authentic, quality reviews from real customers.

I've been in marketing and customer experience for nearly 30 years now, and one thing I've learned is that customer expectations never move backwards. Today's consumers simply expect more of you. What was considered amazing three years ago is table stakes today. And that very much includes how you handle your online reputation – from facts and data, to reviews and ratings.

The bad news is that you're going to have to spend time and effort in an area – reputation management – that perhaps you've overlooked at some level historically. But the good news is that getting serious about your online reputation will have a meaningful, positive impact on the trajectory of your business. And the companion upside is that Yext has not only supplied this guide to help slingshot you past your competitors in your reputation management practices, but also has an amazing software package that will make the whole endeavour easier and more effective.

Now get out there and build that reputation, one customer at a time!



Jay Baer

Founder, Convince & Convert

Author of *Youtility* and *Hug Your Haters*

Co-author of *Talk Triggers*

Your brand reputation derives from the public perception of your business and the resulting conversation around it. Brand reputation is critical to winning and maintaining business and success depends on two major principles:

1. Delivering a great customer experience in every interaction a consumer has with you.
2. Encouraging those consumers to share their experiences in the form of referrals and reviews.

It's exactly what it sounds like: managing your brand's reputation, online and offline, so that you're delivering the experience and message you want to send – everywhere. For brands, reputation means revenue.

But in today's digital world, these interactions are occurring across dozens of touch points and channels, making reputation management a greater challenge – and a greater opportunity – than ever before.

Reputation management is the process of overseeing every factor that influences this public perception of your business.



Why does reputation management matter?

It's simple: your brand's online reputation directly influences whether customers choose to do business with you. Reviews are a huge part of this, with 88% of consumers reporting they trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations.¹ Some research also suggests that reviews produce an average 18% uplift in sales.²

But don't conflate reputation management with review management entirely – reviews are one important part of a holistic reputation management strategy. Reviews tell the story of your customer experience, but your customer experience itself is built on how you deliver on your brand promise throughout every stage of the customer journey. The experience you deliver is of particular importance when it comes to loyalty and retention, too – 52% of the time customers switch brands, it is directly related to customer experience.³

Deliver a winning customer experience, everywhere.

Building a great reputation begins with providing a great experience online. How?

By delivering consistent, comprehensive and correct information everywhere your customers might interact with your business.

Your brand must be informative and reliable across the many maps, apps, search engines, voice assistants and other AI-powered services consumers are using every day to search – at the critical moments of intent when they need your products or services.

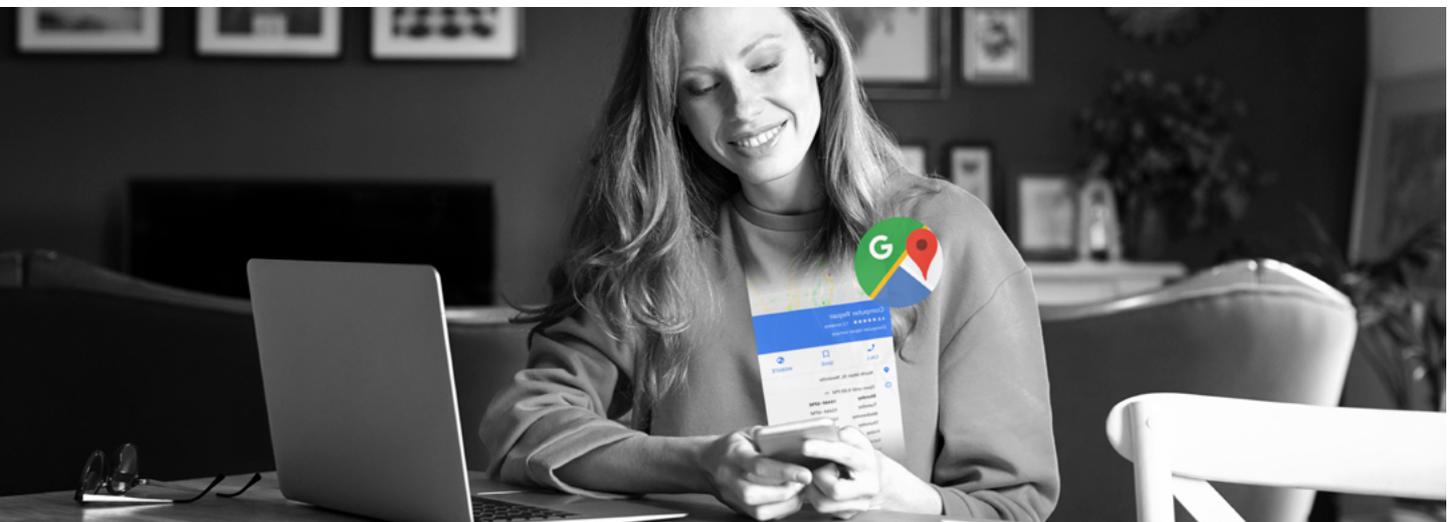
Surfacing in search results and delivering a great customer experience, from discovery to sale, requires:⁴

1. Claiming and verifying your listings across third-party sites
2. Managing all the facts about your business so that information shows up correctly everywhere customers might seek answers (e.g., Google Q&A, via voice assistants like Amazon Alexa, and of course, in search engine results).

Approximately 80% of US internet users prefer using a search engine to find information about local businesses.⁵

Delivering a great customer experience that boosts your online reputation can't happen if your business doesn't surface in these local search results – or if it shows up with incorrect details. If a customer can't find your phone number, sees outdated product or provider information, or visits the wrong address, they'll be frustrated and unlikely to return. For example: a customer makes a high-need, high-intent search directly within Google Maps for laptop repair when their computer isn't working. If your tech repair business' hours are listed incorrectly on Google My Business and the customer arrives to find the shop closed, you've lost a sale – and fostered a negative experience. At best, this damages your reputation with that one customer. At worst, far more customers hear about it if the first customer writes a scathing online review.

Your reputation is at stake if your information is wrong. A bad listing could lead to a bad review for your location – which could result in a potential customer choosing to transact with a competitor over you. To build brand trust and deliver a great experience online, brands today need to deliver answers everywhere consumers search.



What role do reviews play in reputation management?

Reviews have been important since the days when they only existed as a food critic's article in the local newspaper. But today, with ever-present smartphones and dozens of online review sites, everyone's a critic – and consumer feedback has a greater impact than ever across verticals.

You probably know that online reviews shape consumer perception of your business and have an impact on their decision to visit, but you may not be aware that they also affect whether your business shows up in search results at all. Google often pre-filters for searches including terms like "best" (e.g., "best Italian restaurant") and will often show results only for businesses with a 4-star rating or above.

Reviews have a strong impact on search positioning. Google looks at several factors to deliver optimal results:⁶

Relevance

Do the business name and listed business vertical match the search?

Distance

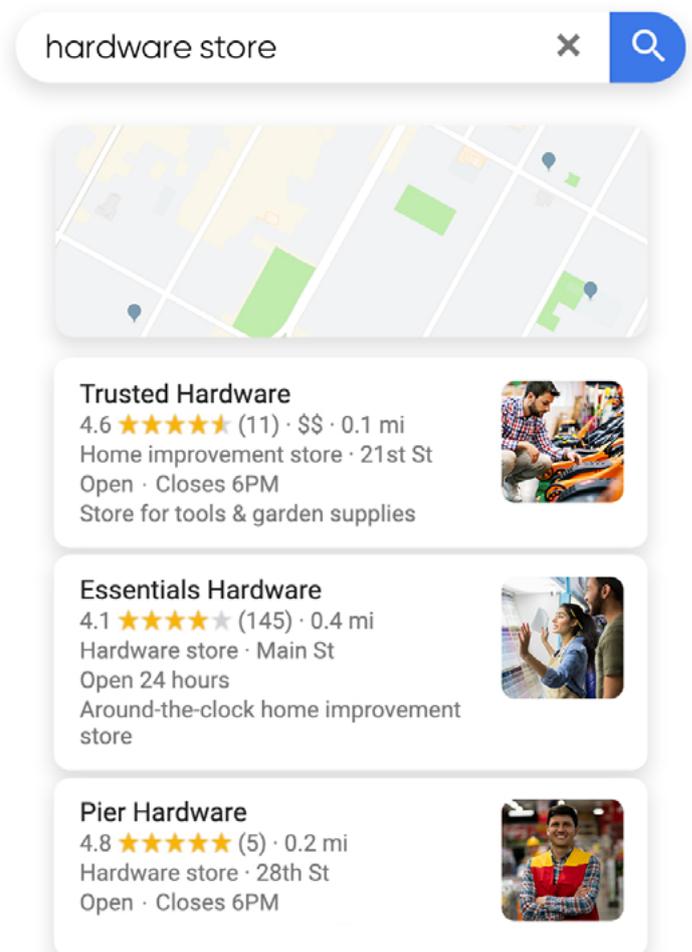
Is the customer reasonably nearby?

Prominence

How many reviews does this business have, how recent are they and what is their rating?

In terms of increasing prominence, the best thing a business can do is to cultivate loyal followers through simply providing great service. A great experience creates natural brand advocates: ratings are a reflection of the business you are already doing and they amplify your existing reputation publicly.

The first step in a successful reputation management programme is to monitor and analyse the feedback customers are already leaving for you around the web. Your customers are telling you how to create a great customer experience, you just have to listen!



Get a holistic view through sentiment analysis.

Sentiment analysis – also referred to as opinion mining or *emotion AI* – is the process of identifying the opinions or feelings expressed in a piece of text or speech, with the goal of determining if the attitude toward a keyword (like a particular product or service) is positive, negative or neutral.

Why does sentiment analysis matter in reputation management? Because gathering data about how a person feels towards your brand (i.e., what words they used in a review, like how they describe your products or services) can help you respond to queries more effectively and use informed feedback to provide a better customer experience. It enables you to stay one step ahead when providing happy customers with the right experiences – as well as potentially *avoiding* future negative reviews. Sentiment analysis helps you take your understanding of what your customers are saying online to the next level.

With the right tools, sentiment analysis allows you to analyse customer feedback at scale to make informed improvements to your business and better understand how it's truly having an impact on your ratings and reviews as a whole.



Know how you stack up when it comes to the competition.

Understanding your online reputation and review performance relative to your competitors is crucial to winning and maintaining business.

Most marketers know the value of competitive intelligence, but it's important to make sure you're putting that information to work with actual metrics about your star rating, and which locations (if you have more than one) are performing best over time against your competition.

Take your reputation management strategy to the next level.

If you're successfully monitoring reviews and implementing meaningful feedback to inform your business, congratulations! You're on the right track, but there are still meaningful ways to take your reputation management strategy to the next level to improve your business and elevate your customer experience.

If your business is already delivering a seamless customer experience across touchpoints, you can have a further positive impact on your online reputation by responding to reviews. Businesses that respond to 75–100% of reviews see, on average, a .53 higher star rating than businesses who don't respond⁷ – which can boost public perception of your brand, and help you show up in more search results for those terms like “best” and “four-star.”

Listening and responding to reviews can help you retain customers, raise your star rating and showcase your business to potential new customers – but less than 50% of businesses today are responding,⁷ so there is a sizeable untapped opportunity in this space.



Will Hanaran
Digital Marketing Manager



“If you want your guests to return, then responding to reviews is going to be critical to build your reputation and avoid people going to a competitor. Responding to a customer can be the quickest way to fix something and give the customer the feeling that they are being listened to.”

Businesses responding have a competitive advantage

On average, locations who do not respond to reviews have an average rating of 3.63 stars. Clients who responded to 75% or more of reviews were rated 4.16 stars – 0.53 stars higher than those who did not.

Relationship of Location Average Rating and Response Strategy



Which types of reviews should I respond to?

Research indicates that you should respond to at least 50% of reviews if you want to see the greatest benefit in terms of customer engagement and star ratings increase, but you can see a benefit after beginning to respond to just 10, 20% or 30%.⁷ These are often more achievable figures for businesses in the beginning – though businesses who receive fewer reviews may be able to aim higher without seeking outside assistance.

The question, then, is which reviews to respond to. In order to provide the best service to your customers, and benefit your business, Yext research prioritises responding as follows:

- ALL reviews 3 stars and below
- Reviews 4 stars and above that contain detailed comments
- Reviews 4 stars and above without comments

Which sites are most important? As customers interact with your brand across more touch points than ever, the answer is *as many as possible*. But it's a good strategy to start with Google (because of its share of search, as well as the potential to auto-filter for "best"), Facebook, Yelp, TripAdvisor and your own website. Make sure to take into account your business vertical and where your customers are most active to see the maximum benefit.

Regardless of platform, an effective review response is prompt, thoughtful and assistive. Provide information that a customer might be seeking and, in the case of a negative review, address the concern and offer the customer a chance to return.

Keep in mind that this only works if you have a process for who on your team(s) addresses the reviews that need a response. It should be a customer care team, a local manager, or a trusted partner – and determining who is responsible is an important part of building your reputation management strategy as a whole.

Scale your review response.

If you're a multi-location business, you need to contemplate how to grow your review response programme and really make your reputation management strategy work at scale. The first step in growing your review response programme is determining who should manage review response for your business – and what that looks like at scale.

Who should respond and what is the process?

The best practices for a successful review response programme are the same regardless of business size. But while it's easy to assign this responsibility to one local manager at a single location business, deciding who is in charge of monitoring and responding to reviews is more complicated for a multi-location business.

To avoid confusion, your business needs to make a decision about whether review response will be handled by a corporate manager or customer care team, by individual local managers, or a hybrid of the two.

Centralised Approach

Responding to reviews from a corporate level is more likely to guarantee consistency and makes it more certain that responses will adhere to corporate brand guidelines.

Local Response

Empowering your local managers divides the workload. It also makes it more likely that feedback can be implemented in an actionable way at specific business locations. The responder may have even been involved in the experience the review refers to!

There is no "right" way to organise your response programme. Each business has a different structure and requirements. The key to success is to implement a programme that works for you – and to make sure response best practices are followed by all parties involved.

Anatomy of a great Review Response



An effective review response should have four parts: a greeting, a value statement, a sentiment keyword and a closing.

Greeting

A friendly opening that mentions the customer's name or username.

Value statement

This is an opportunity to make a statement that discusses your brand in a positive light and affirms your values. State the experience that your brand strives to deliver. For example: "At [business name], we always strive to provide great customer service."

Closing

A polite and personal sign off. Bonus points for inviting them back to your business again – either to show them a better experience, or to continue more of the excellent service they commended you for! You can also direct the customer to a phone number or email address to continue the conversation and get even more feedback.



Jess M. 1 day ago



Went to buy a couch and I waited forever! Not to mention the **dirty floor**. Won't be coming back here again.

Hi Jess,

We always want to serve you as efficiently as possible and provide you only the highest quality products.

We are putting measures in place to clean the dirty floors at our location.

We'd love a chance to make the situation right.

Sentiment keyword

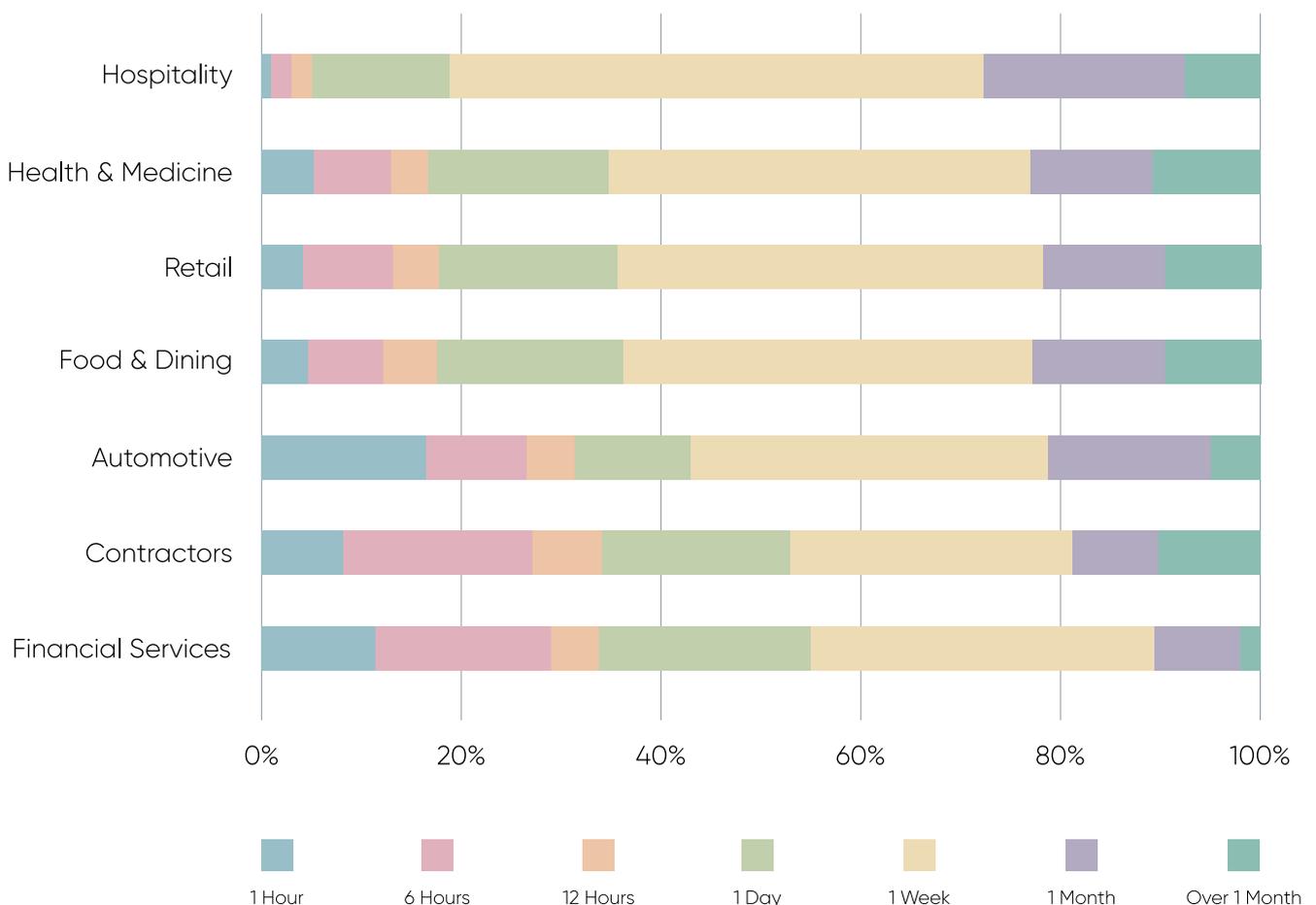
This is part of what makes a response feel personal. Address the customer concern when there's a need and echo back their emotional sentiment. (i.e., "We're so delighted that..."; "We missed the mark with X and we aim to fix it with Y.") Affirm the customer's experience, acknowledging the problem when you're responding to a negative review. When engaging with a positive review, be sure to thank the customer for their support.

How quickly do I need to respond?

It's advisable to respond to your customers as quickly as possible while still providing a thoughtful and helpful response. 82% of customers say that getting their issue resolved quickly is the most important factor in a great customer experience.

When it comes to response time, the faster the better. But if you're curious about average response times by business vertical, the majority of retailers, food service brands, healthcare organisations and financial services institutions respond within a week. The fastest vertical? Financial services – 55% respond within a day!⁷

Review Response Time by Vertical



What happens if I need help responding to reviews at scale?

Once you've determined whether a corporate care team or local managers will handle your reviews, you're off to a good start. That said, issuing high quality responses is time consuming, and some brands decide to explore automated tools that can help.

These automated tools can certainly save you a lot of time, but the key is to make sure that your end response is thoughtful and still sounds human. People are good at sniffing out AI-sounding responses and, if yours seem automated, it can have a negative impact on your overall reputation.

Essentially, intelligent review response tools can be a great time saver – but fully automated responses can be a detriment to the personal connection and customer experience that you want.



Renier Fee, Marketing Director, Music & Arts

MUSIC & ARTS

"I don't have the time or the team to scour the web, find reviews and respond to every single one. With Review Monitoring, Yext made that process so simple for us. By prioritising a positive in-store experience and actively soliciting feedback from happy, loyal customers, the result was that positive reviews skyrocketed by 87% in just one year. At the end of 2018, our average rating was 4.14."



Generate even more reviews to help you stand out in new search experiences.

Finally, it's key that your business continue to receive new and relevant reviews.

To show ratings in organic search results, Google requires that you generate your own reviews directly from your customers that live on your website. Additionally, reviews help power recommendations across many AI-powered services, like Amazon Alexa. If a customer asks Alexa or Siri for the "best dry cleaner near me," it's reviews that inform the "best" term.

Fortunately, generating new reviews is easier than it sounds. 70% of consumers will leave a review if you just ask.¹ You can start by simply asking your customers for feedback over email or text after they have transacted with your business.

Every business should ask for ratings consistently. Following up with an automated email after each customer experience is one way to do this, but it is important that your staff also be trained to ask customers in person to submit feedback.

Even if you have plenty of detailed reviews across platforms, new reviews are an important part of your reputation management strategy because they help keep you relevant – and give your customers the up-to-date view they're looking for (plus, Google takes recency into account when determining "prominence").

Put your best foot forward.

Reputation management makes sure that you're putting your best foot forward with existing and potential customers everywhere they may interact with your brand online. It's impossible to overstate the importance that a seamless customer experience has on online sentiment – and, ultimately, revenue.

In turn, listening to your customers helps you address their concerns and improve this experience over time. By monitoring, analysing, responding to and generating reviews as part of your reputation management strategy, you can see feedback around the web, gain a global brand view, and even stay ahead of trends.

Footnotes:

1. BrightLocal Local Consumer Report, 2016
2. Revoo study shared by eConsultancy, 2016
3. Gartner/CEB Global, 2016
4. Google, GMB Help, "Improve your local ranking on Google," 2019
5. Burke for the Local Search Association study, cited by eMarketer, 2017
6. Google My Business Help,
<https://support.google.com/business/answer/7091?hl=e>
7. Yext Proprietary Study, 2019



The customer journey starts with a question. And consumers expect answers.

Yext puts businesses in control of their facts online with brand-verified answers in search. By serving accurate, consistent, brand-verified answers to consumer questions, Yext delivers authoritative information straight from the source – the business itself – no matter where or how customers are searching. Premier Inn, Marriott, Jaguar Land Rover and businesses around the globe use the Yext platform to capture consumer intent and drive digital discovery, engagement and revenue – all from a single source of truth. Yext's mission is to provide perfect answers everywhere.

Yext has been named a Best Place to Work by Fortune and Great Place to Work®, as well as a Best Workplace for Women. Yext is headquartered in New York City with offices in Amsterdam, Berlin, Chicago, Dallas, Geneva, London, Miami, Milan, Paris, San Francisco, Shanghai, Tokyo and the Washington, D.C. area.

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